

This Week in Congress

April 18, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find it useful.

Rediscovering Kansas through the Annual Big First Listening Tour

This morning, I am starting my annual Big First Listening Tour in Cottonwood Falls. This is my ninth annual tour, stopping in all 69 counties of the First Congressional District. This year's tour will emphasize the importance of small town tourism with many of the stops planned at historical and tourist sites. "Rediscovering Kansas" will help build awareness of Kansas tourism sites throughout the First District.

The annual listening tour provides me with an opportunity to meet personally with Kansans to discuss your concerns and problems and to receive instructions on what I should focus on in Congress. Also, by helping people to rediscover Kansas, we can bring to light the efforts of those who work to preserve and protect the history and individuality of our state.

In addition to Chase County, this morning's stops include Madison, in Greenwood County; Reading, in Lyon County; and Harveyville, in Wabaunsee County.

For a full list of the times and dates of when I'll be in your county, visit my website here: http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ks01_moran/041105TheTour.html

Meeting with Iraqi Agriculture Officials

On Wednesday, I joined House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman, Henry Bonilla (TX-23), for a meeting with the Iraqi Grains Board. Khalil al-Assi, Director General, and Jawoed Ferial, Action Import Manager, met with us to discuss purchases of wheat and rice from the U.S. The board oversees the purchasing of agricultural products for the Iraqi people. The

meeting helped to foster a better working relationship between the U.S. grain industry and this new consumer. For some time, the Iraqis have purchased their wheat from Australia. However, after complaints of high prices and contaminated supply, the Iraqi Grains Board is now looking for other suppliers.

Just last week, Iraq announced the purchase of 60,000 metric tons of U.S. rice. While this is not a Kansas crop, it is good news for our agricultural sector. They are also planning on making a major purchase of hard red winter wheat from Kansas.

Following their visits in Washington, D.C., the delegation is traveling to Kansas where they will spend the next two weeks in a grain-marketing course at Kansas State University. We've worked for a long time to bring this trade delegation from Iraq to Kansas and regain this important market for Kansas wheat.

Unfair "Death Tax" Killed by House

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives passed legislation I sponsored that would end the estate tax. H.R. 8, the Death Tax Repeal Permanency Act of 2005, will repeal the so-called "death tax" that owners of small businesses, farms and ranches have been forced to pay after the death of a loved one.

The death tax is an unfair and unjust burden on our economy and it has punished Kansans trying to build and continue a family business. The last thing our small businesses, family farmers and other entrepreneurs need after the death of a loved one is a bill from the IRS.

Originally created to help offset the costs of World War I, the death tax amounts to a second round of taxation by the federal government on estates. Today, a family-owned business can lose up to 47 percent of its assets when it passes from one generation to the next. In many cases, businesses are forced to liquidate in order to pay the tax.

This week's legislation would permanently repeal the tax by the end of 2010. If Congressional action is not taken, the death tax will be fully reinstated in 2011. I have heard from many Kansas concerned about this issue. Permanently repealing the death tax will help Kansas family businesses and farmers pass their livelihood on to their children and grandchildren.

House Passes Legislation to Reduce Bankruptcy Abuse

On Thursday, the House passed legislation that cracks down on those abusing the bankruptcy system with frivolous filings and provides additional protections for Kansans during the bankruptcy process.

S. 256, the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005, will make it more difficult for deadbeat parents to use bankruptcy as a means to avoid child support or alimony payments, will give courts greater powers to dismiss abusive bankruptcy cases, and will punish attorneys who encourage their clients to file these claims. The legislation also prevents violent criminals or drug traffickers from using bankruptcy to avoid paying their debts, and it includes a merit-based provision, requiring those who are able to pay their debts to do so.

Abuse of the bankruptcy system affects Kansans in the form of higher interest rates and increased costs of goods and services. This can result in billions of dollars in additional expenses nationwide. I'm pleased to see this common-sense solution become law.

Working for a Cure for America's Health Care Problems

On Friday, I addressed nursing and medical students, faculty and local public officials at the University of Kansas School of Medicine in Kansas City. I spoke about possible solutions to the many problems that make up this nation's health care crisis. In Washington, D.C., many policymakers are focused on issues surrounding Social Security. Although this is a pressing issue, I believe that the costs surrounding health care in this country are in need of more immediate attention.

There are several steps we can take to try and lower the costs of health care, including allowing tax credits for Health Savings Account contributions, allowing small businesses to pool their resources and have better bargaining power with health insurance companies and reforming the tort system. We must also improve the patenting process for prescription drugs so that cheaper, generic medications are more readily available to Kansans. On the federal level, I will continue looking for opportunities to lower the costs of health care for Kansans, and all Americans.

For the full text of my speech, visit my website: http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01_moran/speech041505KUMed.html

Receiving the Vision Award from the Kansas Optometric Association

Friday evening, I was honored to receive the Vision Service Award from the Kansas Optometric Association at their annual meeting in Overland Park. The award is presented annually to individuals who have contributed to the welfare of the vision and optometric industry.

I thank the Optometric Association for this award, and commend them on the work they do to preserve and protect Kansans' eyesight. From glaucoma and cataracts to vision problems related to diabetes and other diseases, Kansas eye doctors do great work in preserving this precious sense and are an integral part of the health care industry.

Working to Restore Concurrent Receipt for Kansas Veterans

This week I became a sponsor of H.R. 303, the Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2005. H.R. 303 would allow disabled military retirees to receive immediately, in full, both their retirement pay and their disability pay. I have long been an advocate in Congress for this, also known as concurrent receipt. Veterans have made great sacrifices for our country, and they deserve the full benefits they have earned. H.R. 303 is currently under consideration in the House Armed Services Committee and the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Last year, Congress did pass legislation allowing military retirees who have a 100 percent disability rating to be eligible for full concurrent receipt as of January 1, 2005. I am pleased that Congress has passed this improvement and that Kansas veterans are benefiting from the change. Step by step, we are making progress. I will continue fighting for our nation's veterans and will support future efforts to improve benefits.

Kansas Communities Come to Washington

This week, representatives from several communities in western Kansas traveled to Washington, D.C., to receive an update on activities in Congress and to meet with federal officials. In from Great Bend were City Council Members David Thill and Bill Berryman, Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Director Gary Gore, City Administrator Howard Partington, County Commissioner Betty Chlumsky and County Counselor Richard Boeckman.

In from Garden City were County Commissioner Cliff Mayo, County Administrator Pete Olson, City Commissioner Reynaldo Mesa, Assistant City Manager Matt Allen and Dennis Mesa with Senator Sam Brownback. Representing Dodge City were Ford County Manager Ed Elam, County Commissioner Kim Goodnight, City Attorney Ken Strobel, City Commissioner Jim Sherer, Dodge City Chamber President Bob Wetmore, Horse Thief Reservoir Manager, Ron Allen and Casey Pennington and José Sanchez with National Beef. In from Liberal were City Commissioner C.J. Wettstein, Chamber of Commerce President Kacie Mein, as well as Jack Taylor and Max Zimmerman.

This annual trip is a good opportunity for Kansas city and county officials to meet with federal officials in person and convey their concerns and thoughts to others in Washington, D.C.

In the Office

In addition to the city representatives, many other Kansans were in my office for meetings this week. In representing the Kansas Association of Postmasters were Bill and Peggy Refak and Debbie Wilson of Jetmore, Marty Wright and Randy Collier of Towanda, Jerry Steinman of Sylvia and Al Bacasow of Winfield. They discussed postal reform as well as pension and health benefits for postal employees. In representing the Kansas Economic Development Agencies were Patty Richardson, Executive Director of Great Plains Development in Dodge City; Bill Bolin, Executive Director of South Central Kansas Economic Development in Wichita; and Randy Hrabec, Executive Director of Pioneer Development in Hill City. They were in to discuss funding for economic development. In representing the Kansas Optometric Association and to talk about legislation affecting optometrists was Dr. Mike Hattan of Hays.

The National Conference of State Legislators brought a number of Kansas Senators and Representatives to Washington, D.C. I was able to meet with Senate President Steve Morris of Hugoton, Senate Vice President John Vratil of Leawood, Senator Jay Emler of Lindsborg, and Kansas Representatives Lana Gordon of Topeka, Dennis McKinney of Greensburg, Kevin Yoder of Overland Park, Dean Newton of Prairie Village, Don Hill of Emporia, Melvin Neufeld of Ingalls and Todd Novascone of Wichita.

Dan Senestraro, a dairy farmer from Syracuse, was in to talk about the budget as it relates to current milk price support programs and the 2002 farm bill. Members of the Kansas Beer Distributors Association were in to talk about the repeal of the death tax. Representing the group were Bob Bush, Manager of the City Beverage Co. in Hutchinson; Terry Dow, Manager of Flint Hills Beverage in Mahanattan; Don Schlesselman, General Manager of Eagle Beverage Corporation in Frontenac; Matt Strathman, President of Strathman Sales in Topeka; Kirk Lambright, Co-CEO and general counsel of Classic Eagle Distributing in Lawrence; Bill Goodlatte, Senior Vice President of PDF Dales and Distributing, Inc. in Wichita; and Barry Schwan, President of Schwan, also in Wichita. Julie Govert-Walter, Executive Director of the North Central Flint Hills Area Agency on Aging in Manhattan was in to discuss reauthorization of

the Older Americans Ace and Medicaid funding.

Representatives from the Kansas Livestock Association (KLA) were in to talk about issues affecting the livestock industry. In were KLA President Tom Toll of Lindsborg, President-elect Ron Estes of Atchison, and stock growers council chairman Ken Grecian of Palco. In representing the Kansas Rental Agency were Randall Hardy of Salina and Tim Pounds and William Saunders of the Kansas City area. They discussed taxes on business and legislation to authorize funding for roads and highways. John Schmidt of Marysville was in from the Landoll Corporation to discuss a federal contract for trailers the company produces. In from Quinter was Elizabeth Stover, a first-year medical student, representing the American Osteopathic Association. She talked about Medicare physician reimbursement, student loans and medical liability reform.

Also in this week for tours of the Capitol building were Chris and Jennifer Yowe of Salina, Casey and Nadine Mein and Cecil and Linda Wettstein of Liberal, Stephen and Kathleen Ferry of Great Bend and Darin Pennington of Dodge City.

Very truly yours,

Jerry